



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN

As children we always heard our mothers saying "April showers bring May flowers," while under our breath we were saying "rain, rain, go away, come again some other day." Now, as an adult and as a veteran, I know that landscapes and weather conditions have played a role in every conflict we have fought. Weather and terrain shaped the experiences of our troops and directly dictated their actions.

The next time you get caught outside in windy conditions, a rain storm, hail storm, dust storm or ice storm, please remember our service members are out in these very elements defending our freedoms every day.

Weather conditions can make it uncomfortable to train and defend. Uniforms and boots are soaking wet, tents and creek beds are flooded, and roads and bridges are washed out. I can still vividly see a vehicle belonging to the 211th Sapper Company that was caught in a raging river bed which had been dry days before.

Wet, damp, and miserable conditions give soldiers an extra sense of hardship while observing or defending the enemy, or relocating their unit and equipment.

As you begin to mow your lawn, pick your tulips, and trim your hedges, please remember to keep our troops in your thoughts. They are the prime guardians of our national integrity and security. They are widely respected for their bravery, discipline, and unconditional patriotic values and they have fought adversities and locked horns with intruding enemy forces to ensure freedom, safety and security for all of us.



Inside this issue:

New SDNG Warrant Officers	2
VA Announces New Partnership with VACDC	2
Federal Hiring Freeze	3
Dakota Dunes CBOC	4
VA Caregiver Program	5
New Partners Join SDDVA Team	5
VA CCI New Treatments	6
Easter Egg Hunt at State Veterans	6
Upcoming Events	7

SDNG WELCOMES FOUR NEW WARRANT OFFICERS

The South Dakota Army National Guard welcomed four new warrant officers to its ranks following a commissioning ceremony at Fort McClellan, Alabama, April 8. Warrant officers make up the technical foundation of the Army, specializing in a technical area, like intelligence, aviation, or maintenance throughout their careers.

The newly commissioned warrant officers began the three-phase Warrant Officer Candidate School with online courses and training. Five months of drill weekends held at Fort Meade would follow before candidates attend the final two-week phase in Alabama.

Candidates are tested throughout WOCS both academically and physically in areas ranging from leadership to tactics.

"Warrant Officer Candidate School is a very demanding and stressful course," said Command Chief Warrant Officer 5 Todd Dressler, South Dakota Army National Guard. "These four Soldiers started out last October when they began zero phase and culminated with their appointment to warrant officer one. I could not be more proud of these new warrant officers and it was my honor to be able to attend their graduation and pinning ceremony."

The newly commissioned warrant officers are: Christopher Frost, of Groton; Ashton Hanisch, of Sioux Falls; Kenneth Maas, of Mitchell; and Eric Price, of Miller.



VA ANNOUNCES NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH VACDC

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is changing the way it does business, demonstrating how government can better meet the needs of veterans while saving taxpayer dollars at the same time. Instead of moving forward with an out-of-date plan developed in 2011 to build a \$560 million facility, the VA will instead be partnering with the Veterans Ambulatory Center Development Corporation (VACDC), a nonprofit based in Omaha, Nebraska, to construct a much needed ambulatory care center (ACC) at the current Omaha VA Medical Center campus.

With the support of Congress through the Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed for Veterans Act of 2016 (CHIP IN for Vets Act), the VA will use \$56 million of the original appropriated funds along with roughly \$30 million in donations from VACDC, in order to complete the approximately \$86 million project.

"This trailblazing project represents another example of the bold changes happening at the VA," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin. "This project will lay the groundwork for future public/private partnerships aimed at providing veterans access to state-of-the-art facilities and will significantly improve the quality of care we are able to provide to our nation's veterans."

The Omaha VA's future ambulatory care center is the first of five pilot projects nationwide that will be built under the new innovated donation authority concept authorized by the CHIP IN for Vets Act.

VA GUIDANCE FOR FEDERAL HIRING FREEZE

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released guidance memo M-17-22, [Comprehensive Plan for Reforming the Federal Government and Reducing the Federal Civilian Workforce](#). This guidance describes specific actions that OMB and agencies, including the VA, will be taking to chart the course for a leaner, more effective, more accountable government. Importantly, this memo lifts the Federal hiring freeze. However, this does not mean business as usual for hiring.

Agencies, including the VA, are charged with developing reform proposals that improve delivery of services to the American people while identifying opportunities to reduce duplication or overlap. OMB Memo M-17-22 requires the VA to:

1. Begin taking immediate actions to achieve near-term workforce reductions and cost savings, including planning for funding levels in the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Budget Blueprint;
2. Develop a plan to maximize employee performance by June 30, 2017; and
3. Submit an Agency Reform Plan to OMB in September 2017 as part of the Department's FY 2019 Budget submission to OMB that includes long-term workforce reductions.

As directed in the Presidential Executive Order on a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch, issued March 13, 2017, the VA is putting together a "proposed plan to modernize the agency [VA] in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of" the VA. The VA must submit a draft in June and a final plan by September 9, 2017. Given the comprehensive look they are taking with regard to what and how the VA will deliver services to veterans into the future, the Secretary has directed that the VA be deliberative in the hiring actions to ensure they are postured for success when they submit their plan to OMB. To this end, the VA will proceed as follows with regard to the hiring freeze:

1. The Secretary's Memo, Exemption to Hiring Freeze Under Presidential Memorandum, dated January 23, 2017, which was issued on March 13, 2017, remains in effect. Exemptions identified in the memo will continue to be exempt and hiring is expected to continue.
2. Where there is an absolute critical need to fill a vacancy, which is not exempt in the Secretary's March 13, 2017, memo, Acting Under Secretaries and the VA Chief of Staff, for the Staff Offices, may approve such requests. This approval authority may not be further delegated. These requests must be for very critical situations, must be approved in writing on a position-by-position basis, and must be included with the Request for Personnel Action submitted to the servicing human resources office.

The Secretary is hosting a VA senior leaders mid-year meeting later this month, during which the VA's vision and priorities will be discussed. The complete alignment among the VA's vision, priorities, functions, funding, and assignment of human resources; thus, attendees at the mid-year meeting should be prepared to discuss OMB memo M-17-22, the Executive Order on a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch, and how to proceed over the coming months with deliberative hiring strategies that posture the VA for a future the VA of Choice.

GROUNDBREAKING FOR DAKOTA DUNES CBOC

Veterans in southeastern South Dakota will soon have a new place to go for their healthcare needs.

The Sioux Falls VA Healthcare System held their groundbreaking last week for their new VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Dakota Dunes, South Dakota.

The clinic will provide healthcare needs, optometry, audiology, and mental health services, and will be adding additional services when the doors open.

There are currently about 4,000 veterans who use the current facility in Sioux City and that number is expected to increase when the new clinic opens.

Sioux Falls VA Clinic officials say everything is on time for the clinic to be completed by April 2018.



VA ANNOUNCES INTERNAL REVIEW OF CAREGIVER PROGRAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that, effective April 17, it has suspended revocations initiated by VA medical centers based on eligibility for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) for three weeks.

"The VA is taking immediate action to review the National Caregiver Support Program to ensure we honor our commitment to enhance the health and well-being of veterans," said Dr. David J. Shulkin, Secretary of the VA. "I have instructed an internal review to evaluate consistency of revocations in the program and standardize communication with veterans and caregivers nationwide."

The VA Medical Centers will continue accepting PCAFC applications, approving applicants based upon current eligibility criteria, processing appeals and monitoring eligible veterans' well-being at least every 90 days, unless otherwise clinically indicated.

"Caregivers play a critically important role in the health and well-being of veterans, and caring for an injured veteran is a labor of love," said Dr. Poonam Alaigh, Acting VA Under Secretary for Health. "We remain focused on process improvements and support services for our family caregivers so they can take care of our veterans."

Revocations exempted from this suspension include those made at the request of the veteran or caregiver; by the local Caregiver Support Program for cause or noncompliance; or due to death, permanent institutionalization or long-term hospitalization of a veteran or caregiver.

The VA recognizes that family caregivers who care for veterans in their homes have been putting veterans first since the founding of our nation. The VA's Caregiver Support Program will continue to provide a menu of training, education and resources to enhance the family caregiver role. These support improved family caregiver understanding of the impact that their work has on the health and well-being of the veteran they care for.

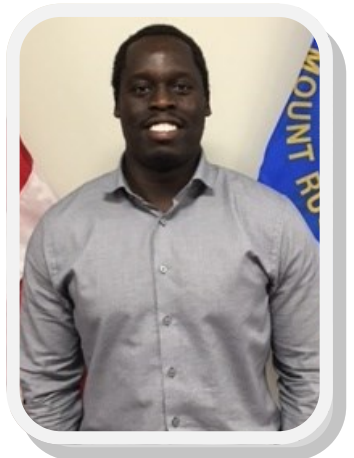
NEW PARTNERS JOIN SDDVA TEAM



Sheila Shaffer has joined the SDDVA team and will be the voice you hear when you call the Pierre office. Sheila is a Pierre native and graduated from T.F. Riggs High School. She and her husband, Dan, of 22 years, have two sons, Morgan and Pierce. They are an avid outdoors family and can be found either out on their boat, or camping in the summer months.

Abraham Lokonobei is our new State Veterans Service Officer in the Claims Office. Abraham was born in Nairobi, Kenya. He traveled to the United States at a very young age and was raised in Sioux Falls. He served four years in the US Marines where he was stationed in MCAS Miramar. His enlistment consisted of two deployments with one aboard the USS Peleliu with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit as well as a tour in Afghanistan. He enjoys going to the gym and sports.

Please join us in welcoming Sheila and Abraham to our SDDVA team.



VA EXPLORES NEW VETERAN-CENTRIC TREATMENTS THROUGH CENTER FOR COMPASSIONATE INNOVATION

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the launch of the Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI), which will explore emerging therapies that may enhance veterans' physical and mental well-being.

In addition, the VA is seeking proposals to fulfill CCI's mission of finding innovative approaches to health care, which may support those veterans who are unsuccessful with conventional treatment. Proposals may be submitted through <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/> and will be evaluated through a rigorous algorithm that critically assesses the safety and efficacy of the innovation.

"The VA is unique in our approach to health care," said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. "We are committed to offering veterans cutting-edge and innovative care. That means carefully exploring every avenue that will promote well-being."

CCI explores innovations in the health-care industry as well as innovative practices currently being piloted on a small scale within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). CCI is primarily interested in innovations that address post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain and suicidality. However, CCI will explore any safe and ethical innovation intended to improve veterans' health and well-being.

CCI is not an implementation office intended to conduct research, clinical treatment or establish a vendor relationship. CCI is strategically positioned to spotlight cutting-edge therapies and treatment modalities emerging in private industry. CCI is an example of the VA's quest to continue as a leader in providing innovative and effective treatments for veterans.

EASTER BUNNY VISITS STATE VETERANS HOME CAMPUS

The annual Hot Springs Easter Egg Hunt, sponsored by the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, was held Saturday on the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home campus.

There were approximately 150 children that participated in the hunt and visited the Easter Bunny!!!!

This hunt allows the residents a great opportunity to see the excitement of the children and their zest for life.



Upcoming Events

Apr 22—USD Student Veterans Club 5K Run—10:00 am (CT)
Apr 28-30—DAV Annual Convention—AmericInn—Fort Pierre
May 5-6 Veterans Day and Howard Wood Relays
May 6—Military Order of the Purple Heart Convention—Rapid City Howard Johnson—10:00 am (MT)
May 12—Improving Combat Veterans Care—Sioux Falls University Center
Jun 10—SD Marine Corps League Annual Meeting—Pierre Post 8 (520 W. Pierre Street) - 10:00 am (CT)
Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown—Ramkota
Jun 22-25—State VFW Convention—Pierre—Ramkota
Aug 14-17—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre—Ramkota

Here's
What's
Happening!

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